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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS FR 002209

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TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [PREL](#) [FR](#) [CH](#) [SP](#) [PK](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: UNESCO DIRECTOR GENERAL SUSSESSION: CONVERSATIONS  
WITH CHINA, SPAIN, PAKISTAN, KUWAIT

REF: A. (A) PARIS FR 2202  
[1](#)B. (B) PARIS FR 2144  
[1](#)C. (C) PARIS FR 2153

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LOUISE V. OLIVER FOR REASON 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Africa told Ambassador Oliver that he does not believe that African countries will endorse Egypt's candidate for Director General of UNESCO Farouk Hosni at the African Union Conference in mid-January. Ambassador Oliver also discussed the Egyptian candidacy with the Chinese, Pakistani, and Spanish Ambassadors to UNESCO, all of whom said that their countries had not yet formally endorsed Mr. Hosni. In addition to meeting with the Kuwaiti Ambassador to UNESCO, Ambassador Oliver spoke with the Lithuanian, Moroccan, and Greek Ambassadors to UNESCO concerning the Director General race. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During a lunch with Ambassador Oliver on December 3, UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Africa, Mr. Noureini Tidjani-Serpos, said that many African countries have concerns about the candidacy of Egypt's Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. Although he knew that the Egyptians were exerting pressure on African countries to endorse Mr. Hosni at the mid-January meeting of the African Union, he is advising them not to do so. He said that at the last election for Director General in 1999, the African Union endorsed the Egyptian candidate, Ismail Serageldin, who ended up pulling out of the race after getting only six votes in the Executive Board's secret ballot. He said that it was a big embarrassment for the African countries. Therefore, he is urging them to wait until the July meeting of the African Union before making any kind of endorsement, as by then they will know who all the candidates are.

[1](#)3. (C) When Ambassador Oliver asked whether there was anything that the U.S. should do in this regard, Mr. Tidjani-Serpos replied that it might be helpful for the U.S. to contact Mali, the Chair of the Nominating Committee for the AU, to reinforce his message about not making any endorsement at the January AU meeting. He added that contacting the head of the AU, Madagascar, would also be a good idea, as well as one or two additional countries that had close relationships with the U.S. and leadership positions in the AU. He did not recommend contacting too many African countries, as he thought that the U.S. role should be as discreet as possible. (Mission agrees with these suggestions. End Comment)

[1](#)4. (C) During a breakfast with Ambassador Oliver on December 4, the Chinese Ambassador to UNESCO, Mrs. Shi Shuyun, said that she did not think that China had endorsed Mr. Hosni's candidacy, as had been mentioned in the weekly Egyptian magazine, Al-Ahram, and that she thought it was too early for China to endorse any candidate. When Ambassador Oliver said that she had been told that a Chinese official had indeed expressed China's support for Mr. Hosni, Ambassador Shi asked whether the Chinese official was based in Cairo or came from

Beijing. Ambassador Oliver said that she did not know and would try to find out. (Comment: Since it was clear that the Chinese Ambassador knew nothing about China's support for Mr. Hosni, we should find out exactly what was said to the Egyptians. End Comment)

15. (C) During a conversation with Ambassador Oliver on December 4, the Spanish ambassador to UNESCO, Maria Jesus San Segundo, said that although it was correct that the Spanish Minister of Culture had expressed support for Mr. Hosni's candidacy, as was mentioned in Mr. Hosni's interview in the Al-Ahram magazine, his statement had also said that Spain appreciated the qualities of all the candidates for Director General. Ambassador San Segundo said that Spain's position was that it was too early to make a final decision on a candidate for Director General, and that there had been no official note from Spain to Egypt regarding Mr. Hosni's candidacy. The Spanish Ambassador also stressed the good bilateral relationships that Spain had with Egypt.

16. (C) During a meeting with Ambassador Oliver on December 4, the Pakistani Ambassador to UNESCO, Ms. Asma Anisa, said that she had been surprised to learn that Mr. Hosni also had stated in the Al-Ahram interview that Pakistan was one of the countries supporting his candidacy. After repeating that she had no knowledge of Pakistani support for Mr. Hosni, Ambassador Anisa said that she felt that it was too early to make a decision on any candidate, and that Pakistan would wait until after the May 31 deadline for new candidates had passed before endorsing a candidate.

17. (C) During a meeting with Ambassador Oliver on December 4, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to UNESCO, Mr. Abduirazzak

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Al-Nafisi, said that although the Arab Group might have been able to find a stronger Arab candidate for the Director General position, the fact was that for better or worse Mr. Hosni was the Arab candidate. Ambassador Al-Nafisi added that although he himself had some concerns about Mr. Hosni, he would fight hard to get Mr. Hosni elected, as he wanted to see an Arab Director General. When Ambassador Oliver asked him whether there was any chance that Egypt might decide not to move ahead with Mr. Hosni's candidacy if it learned that a number of countries had doubts about Mr. Hosni, Ambassador Al-Nafisi said no. The Kuwaiti Ambassador said that the Arab countries had united behind one candidate to avoid splitting their votes as had happened in the 1999 Director General election, and that they would all support Egypt's choice. Ambassador Al-Nafisi added that it was highly unlikely that there would be another Arab candidate, at least not until May, and that would depend on how things were going with Mr. Hosni's candidacy.

18. (C) When Ambassador Oliver mentioned that the U.S. had serious concerns with Mr. Hosni's candidacy, the Kuwaiti Ambassador asked exactly what those concerns were. Ambassador Oliver replied that the U.S. did not think that someone who made the kinds of provocative statements such as those made by Mr. Hosni was the right kind of person to serve as Director General. Ambassador Oliver added that the U.S. was also disturbed by some of the statements made about Mr. Hosni in the Al-Ahram magazine interview. Ambassador Al-Nafisi asked if the U.S. had proof that Mr. Hosni had actually done the things that he was being accused of. Ambassador Oliver said that although she was unable to provide details at that time, the fact that many other countries also had concerns about Mr. Hosni indicated that it was not just the U.S. that had negative impressions of the Egyptian candidate. The Kuwaiti Ambassador then suggested the possibility that the accusations were the result of domestic politics and came from those within Egypt who did not like Mr. Hosni. He said that he had advised the Egyptian Ambassador to tell Mr. Hosni that he should spend more time at UNESCO so that people could get to know him better. He added that he was concerned about the fact that Mr. Hosni's

campaign had not been very active recently.

¶9. (C) Ambassador Oliver then told the Kuwaiti Ambassador that she was disturbed that Mr. Hosni had said in his Al-Ahram magazine interview that "The Americans have so far withheld their support. What I feel, and I hope that I am wrong, is that they don't want an Arab Muslim to be the next UNESCO director general." Ambassador Oliver said that statement was not correct, and emphasized that U.S. concerns were focused on Mr. Hosni himself, and not on the fact that he is an Arab Muslim. She also said that she would be disappointed if Mr. Hosni's campaign started to make those kinds of comments, but that if he did, how should the U.S. respond. Ambassador Al-Nafisi replied that he had not seen the Al-Ahram interview, but that he also would not want to see that kind of statement made during the campaign. However, he added that even if Mr. Hosni did not repeat those remarks, it was likely that there would be those who would interpret U.S. lack of support for Mr. Hosni in that manner. The Kuwaiti Ambassador also said that it was important to distinguish between official and unofficial statements. He went on to state that Mr. Hosni must focus on explaining his vision and ideas to the UNESCO community in order to prove that he is in fact the best candidate, and that the Egyptians should not discourage other candidates from entering the Director General race.

¶10. (C) During dinner on December 3, Ambassador Oliver had several conversations that related to the Director General race. The Greek Ambassador to UNESCO, George Anastassopoulos, said that it was very important to find some way to stop Mr. Hosni's candidacy, as he would be a disaster for UNESCO. The Lithuanian Ambassador, Ms. Ina Marciulionyte, who at the moment is the only formal candidate, said that she had almost finalized her brochures and would soon be sending them out. The Moroccan Ambassador, Mrs. Aziza Bennani, said that it had been very difficult for her to have had to withdraw from the Director General race. When Ambassador Oliver asked her whether she would consider reentering the race if the current situation changed, she was noncommittal, but added that anything was possible.

¶11. (C) Comment: It is clear from these conversations that the situation of the Director General race is far from clear. Although Ambassador Oliver had been told that the Kuwaiti Ambassador is very unhappy with the choice of Mr. Hosni, it turns out that his desire for an Arab Director General is much stronger than his concerns about Mr. Hosni. This is probably true for other Arab states as well. It is also clear that Kuwait, as the current Chair of the Arab Group, will work closely with Egypt on Mr. Hosni's campaign. In

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addition, it seems that Spain is playing a double game by having a statement of support for Mr. Hosni made by its Minister of Culture, not its Foreign Minister, and carefully wording it in such a way that it thinks it will keep the door open if Spain decides to change its position later on in the race. However, Spain would probably pay a heavy price with Egypt if it actually did that. Since other countries may try to do that as well, the U.S. must closely examine statements of support for Mr. Hosni. It is also clear that as capitals get more involved in the Director General race, UNESCO Ambassadors will not always be completely up to date about what is going on in their home countries. Moreover, given their bilateral relations with Egypt, many countries will prefer to say that it is too early to make a decision than to suggest that they have serious concerns about Mr. Hosni's candidacy. Finally, since it is generally agreed that the lack of an endorsement for Mr. Hosni at the AU meeting in January would be a real set-back for his candidacy, the Egyptians might decide to wait until after that meeting before finalizing Mr. Hosni's candidacy.

OLIVER